DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 080 450 SP 006 661

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TITLE The Vermont Teacher Corps: Educational Impact and Change.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Field Experience Programs; *Individual Instruction; Inservice Teacher Education; *Performance Based Teacher Education; *Teacher Interns
IDENTIFIERS Vermont

ABSTRACT

The Vermont Teacher Corp is an experiment in field-centered, competency-based teacher education, utilizing performance criteria to measure progress of the individual student intern. Much of the intern's time is spent in school-community service; course work is done through consultation and independent study. Main objectives are a) to develop and test a model in graduate teacher education for the University of Vermont, b) to provide additional personnel and instructional approaches to schools, c) to provide individualized instruction, and d) to provide the University with the opportunity to test a variety of field-centered experiences. (JB)

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THE VERMONT TEACHER CORPS: EDUCATIONAL IMPACT AND CHANGE[1]

Alan H. Wheeler

A Brief Overview

During the early months of 1970, the College of Education of the University of Vermont entered into a partnership with the Vermont State Department of Education, the United States Office of Education, and five school districts in Vermont. A decision was made to accept the opportunity to institute a two year program of teacher education leading to a master's degree in elementary education. This program, like other Teacher Corps programs throughout the country, was seen as an experiment in field-centered, competency-based teacher education, utilizing performance criteria to measure individually the progress of each student-intern. In practice, this meant that the individual intern would spend much of his time in a particular school and community working with children. Course work would be done largely through independent study in consultation with the faculty of the Teacher Corps and the College of Education. As the nature of the program implies, individual students would progress at different rates, acquiring whatever competencies necessary for their individual professional interests. This demanded a great deal of flexibility, particularly in terms of curriculum at the college level, in order to maximize individual potential.

In June, 1970 the Vermont Teacher Corps began to operationalize these concepts. Drawing from a pool of over 650 applicantions, 33 interns were selected to participate in the program. In addition, five team leaders, designated as master teachers, were selected to assist in the on site supervision of each team of interns. During the

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[1] The author wishes to thank the interns, staff, and faculty of the Vermont Teacher Corps, all of whom contributed to the final report on which this article is based. The Vermont Teacher Corps was a federally funded project of USOE.

SP 006 661

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first year of operation, five school sites were selected -- Alburg, Barre, Burlington, Rutland, and Winooski. Following a preservice program for team leaders and interns during the months of July and August, 1970, the interns were placed in equal distribution among the five sites. The main objectives of the Vermont Teacher Corps included: 1) providing the opportunity to develop and test a new model in graduate teacher education for the College of Education; 2) providing additional personnel and new instructional approaches to schools which would further enhance the educational opportunities for children; 3) providing individualized instructional strategies and differentiated staffing arrangements to meet the needs and interests of children in the various school systems; 4) providing the University with the opportunity to develop and test a variety of field centered experiences using a competency based model. The United States Office of Education requires Teacher Corps Programs to specifically orient themselves toward education for children from low-income families. Consequently, all schools involved in the program served a select population.

During the first year of the program interns were placed in schools working in classrooms with regular teachers and spending a portion of their time in the communities which were served by the particular school. Since all interns held at least undergraduate degrees, they were expected to assume a great degree of responsibility for planning and implementing instructional programs. Because all of the interns had little or no prior training or experience in education, they were seen as valuable resources bringing to the classroom a variety of disciplines. In some cases, interns who demonstrated competence were given full responsibility for a classroom. This work took the form of "team teaching" with another intern and team leader closely supervised by Teacher Corps faculty and the school's teaching staff. For the most part, the first year was spent in orienting interns in the education process, developing basic teaching skills and strategies, and identifying individual and professional interests.

By the end of the first year, individuals had progressed to the point where they were able to identify specific areas of educational interest. This process resulted in changes in professional involvement to the extent that during the second year of the program the number of teaching sites had more than doubled and reflected a great diversity of involvement. This involvement ranged from teaching in a first grade to teaching in senior high school; from working in a day care center to team teaching MACOS in a middle school; from teaching special education and reading to working in a group home for pre-delinquent boys and girls. In addition to their school and university components, interns continually worked in community based activities, the extent of which is somewhat overwhelming given the time limitations imposed by the other components and the fact it was just a two year program.

Reflections

As the staff of the program gathered to compile the final report we felt a feeling of satisfaction, yet, at the same time frustration in the realization that although we accomplished much, we were concerned about how much of what we implemented would be continued. We trust that these reflections reveal an accurate perception of our programs evolvement and involvement. Overall, we feel the objectives we outlined in the original proposal were met and in many instances went far beyond many of our initial expectations. As examples, we initiated a competency-based teacher education program in elementary education; we developed school-community linkages that never before existed; we attempted a truly community-based education project; we provided alternative strategies for learning for our Teacher Corps interns; and we "opened up" many schools, classrooms and communities in Vermont that might have heretofore been considered "closed".

With the magnitude of our attempts came many successes but also some unsuccessful attempts--not so much unsuccessful in the literal sense but rather in the sense that some of these attempts at open education did not materialize to the extent we desired.

We felt we established an exemplary program, if for no other reason than we dared to try new approaches in the training of teachers and in the education of children in Vermont schools.

It is this author's sincere wish that he could share with the reader the many positive comments submitted from the Vermont Teacher Corps interns. However, limitations of space do not permit. Two comments are representative. A complete list is available for any who may be interested.

> ....The efficacy of the University of Vermont Teacher Corps is illustrated not only by its results but by its willingness to experiment with radically new techniques. Vermont has taken some steps toward the improvement of education for all of its children, Teacher Corps has played no small part. I hope we continue in this direction.
>
> R.M.

> ....Teacher Corps has provided the framework and the opportunity to learn, as well as to teach....What has Teacher Corps meant to me? It has meant an opportunity to begin -- to begin to learn, to begin to teach, to begin to make positive changes in our schools and their ways of handling children.
>
> E.J.

As one views the impact at the university, school, and community levels, it is felt that the Vermont Teacher Corps project resulted in a number of educational innovations and changes within the universities, schools and communities which we served. The following is a brief description of the impact we felt we made at each of these three levels.

The University

As a result of the Vermont Teacher Corps program the teacher education program within the College of Education at the University of Vermont initiated a number of steps to move in the direction of more competency based programs. In addition, there was increased emphasis on more extensive field experiences at each level of our undergraduate program utilizing a more individualized and personalized approach. Additionally, the teacher education program area has provided additional alternative strategies within its undergraduate program.

Another thrust was the initiation of a portal school concept which, within Vermont, took the form of staff development centers. These staff development centers have provided the entire College of Education with the vehicle for opening up its programs for additional field experiences as well as the initiation of a modularized form of instruction.

Although the Vermont Teacher Corps provided a viable model for the teacher education program area in the College of Education, in order to operational this model certain modifications should be instituted. The essential elements of such a competency based component would be:

--A one year (minimum) field experience in a portal school.

--A program of modularized instruction during the year long field experience.

--A four year course of study which integrated traditional university classes and modular approaches. Standard exit requirements would include both required modules and required classes.

--Modular approaches to teacher education would be provided as alternatives to regular class courses.

--A community component would be required of all Teacher Education majors.

--Software and hardware instructional systems could be greater utilized to provide instruction in basic skills. Students could demonstrate competence in these areas before moving on to certain experiences.

--The university would need to further develop this model utilizing 'hard money' whenever possible in order to minimize the temporary effect of 'soft money'.

--Faculty participating in such a program would need to be carefully screened to ensure commitment to a competency-based, field centered concept.

As we review the impact made by teacher corps at the university level, it appears as though Teacher Corps, Washington has been funding programs which address themselves to change in methodology and organizational patterns without first deciding on the goals and purposes of education in the public schools. Individualized instruction, differentiated staffing, etc., are ways of achieving goals as they apply to the skills,

knowledge, attitudes and behaviors in education. Present programs overlook change in knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors as the school perceives them and introduces new methodologies to do the same thing.

If we, and Teacher Corps, are interested in really helping children to control and live in an ever more complex future, we must set realistic goals and objectives in terms of what is necessary to live in the future. Once this has been established we can then decide on the ways in which it can best be accomplished. This also holds true for the teachers of teachers. Until new priorities in curriculum and content are established and reflected in the preparation of teachers, then fundamental change remains an illusion. If we are going to innovate, we must do it at the goal and value level.

The School System

As a result of the Vermont Teacher Corps Program, we could spend an entire book relating the number of advantages accured to the schools as a result of the project. With involvement in over ten school districts and communities, it can be easily imagined the overwhelming contributions provided. However, for purposes of this article only a few of the highlights will be presented.

Initially, and most importantly, educational opportunities for children were immeasurably enhanced as a result of the presence of Teacher Corps. Not only did we provide a system of personalized and individualized instruction for children but, in many instances, teachers were "won over" to the concept of individualizing instruction. Pupils were observed in terms of not only their performance in school but additionally in terms of their home life, peer and sibling relationships, family structure, and economic profile. Interns and team leaders "gave" themselves to children in a virtual process of pupil rediscovery within which each pupil could

find himself to be a worthwhile, cared for human being. Because Teacher Corps provided a newer, more interesting approach to teaching and contact with children, teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relations improved and attitudes toward school and learning were positively enhanced.

The initial impact of the Teacher Corps on Vermont schools came, not so much as a surprise, as an unexpected bombardment of innovative, high rish ideas from people determined to open avenues of educational impact and change. Surprisingly, the Teacher Corps' eagerness for somewhat immediate change and the school systems reluctant, and sometimes fearful reaction--engulfed in uncertainty - created a most favorable co-existence.

In viewing the impact on the teaching and administrative staff of the cooperating schools, it can be said that through day to day inservice training and educational renewal, the educational needs of both inservice teachers and teachers in training (the interns) were updated and enhanced. New techniques, program development, and needed curriculum revision were initiated and implemented as the program evolved. The creation of systems of differentiated roles provided improved instructional opportunities for children while utilizing the interests and expertise of the teachers, interns, teacher aides, and pupils.

Finally, our presence stirred many teachers and administrators out of the backwater of conservativism and lethargy. If change or the process of change did not occur, at least an awakening of investigative spirit and professional and personal re-examination of their educational goals and inspirations did occur. It can also be said that we discovered that educational leadership, at all levels, need additional opportunities and skills to explore alternatives to the traditional approaches to education. Additionally, teachers need an organized and expanded inservice program that reflects trends and competencies in the teaching-learning process. Particular attention should be provided for the further development of individualizing instruction and what that <u>really</u> means in terms of commitment, time allocation and classroom

organization. Furthermore, teachers, instructional aides, and paraprofessionals need a support system to assist them in their quest for developing skills in identification of their own strengths and weaknesses as well as the diagnosis of the learning problems of their students.

The Community

Identity with the community related aspects of the programs opened doors to a fresh participation of parents and interest groups to long isolated from the school. Through forays into the community at large, we aided the process through which the community began to view the school as the source of regenerated hope and activity.

The following projects sustained themselves during the tenure of the program and, in many instances, have continued since the program ceased operating in June of 1972. It is impossible to name every aspect of community involvement because there has literally been dozens of "one-shot" involvements. What follows then are the "highlights" of intern participation throughout Vermont.

The team in Barre, Vermont involved themselves in establishing cross-age tutoring programs, a Bib Brother-Big Sister program, and home visitation/counselling activities. Additionally, a "cellar" was opened to serve as a "hot line" for youth needing assistance.

The Abrams Project entailed the devoted time and effort of a couple who opened their own home to youth who, for whatever reasons, left their homes or were involved in a personal crisis.

In the village of Alburg, Vermont, interns opened a teen center for after school and weekend activities, as well as a bookmobile for youths and adults.

In Winooski, Vermont, a model cities project, arts, crafts, and music were provided for the youth of the community as well as senior citizens. The hot breakfast program in Winooski represented perhaps the single most extensive effort provided by Teacher Corps. Each morning as many as 40-75 children were fed in the program. This was truly a total school-community effort.

In our more rural projects, located in Central and Northeast Vermont, we installed a drug "hot line", participated in 4-H Club activities, and assisted the staff of a group home for pre-delinquent youth. Additionally, we became extensively involved in the establishment of projects in pottery and photography.

The magnitude of these efforts cannot be dealt with adequately in this article. The time, energy and involvement were overwhemling. The results were most rewarding.

Conclusion

In keeping with its proposal the University of Vermont Teacher Corps program consistently sought to establish relationships among the university, the schools, and the various communities which were served. This effort resulted in providing all three areas with increased opportunities for communication and the sharing of resources. In most sites Teacher Corps introduced new opportunities for this type of involvement.

Not only has Teacher Corps provided assistance by way of core faculty working with interns and in-service staff, but there was also an increase in involvement with many areas in the College of Education at the University of Vermont. It has been realized that manpower in these various areas are interested in building closer relationships with school systems throughout Vermont and many schools have responded to this opportunity for improving their expertise. It is safe to say that these relationships have continued. To this extent the "walls" between the many school systems and the university were overcome to a very significant degree.

It is difficult to determine the full extent to which the university, the school systems, and the communities benefited. However, it can be said that the program has trained teachers to work specifically with low income children in a highly individualized manner, it has provided school districts with additional staff and alternative staffing approaches and, as pointed out earlier, it has "opened up" many schools and communities that heretofore might have been considered "closed".

Furthermore, it has provided the university and the schools the opportunity to conceptualize and operationalize team teaching--differentiated staffing techniques and various patterns of personalized instruction. The opportunity has also been provided to test many of the concepts presented in the Vermont Design for Education.

Finally, the Vermont Teacher Corps has represented an additional attempt to improve many areas of education for all children in Vermont. At a period in history where virtually all agree that constructive change is needed at all levels in education, it appears as though the Vermont Teacher Corps has provided one viable alternative in the preparation of elementary teachers for today's schools.